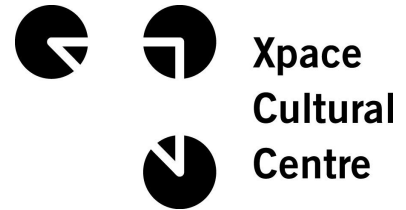


MAIN SPACE (WEST)



IN THE COMPANY OF THINGS

Hayeon Lee

September 5 – October 17, 2026

What are the bounds of material? What happens when the material itself shapes the work? Hayeon Lee's exhibition, *IN THE COMPANY OF THINGS*, presented in the Project Space at Xpace Cultural Centre approaches clay with humour, curiosity, and a desire to understand the material beyond the traditional context of ceramic craft. The artist seeks to engage with clay from a multi-sensory approach: the sound of clay through vibration, touch visualized by mounds of clay fracturing atop a vinyl sheet, the scent of fine dust permeating the air, the earthy taste of the material—a clay immersion.

In the exhibition, the gallery space, often a static arena, becomes one of movement through Lee's examination of -다aga (-daga)¹: a clear acrylic chair scrapes against clay in a state of dryness that halts and resists its motion. As the clay continues to dry over the course of the 6-week exhibition, it shrinks and fractures into plate-like slabs. The chair's continued movement causes the slabs to be pushed, displaced, and broken down into a granular form. Resonant sound waves permeate the air, vibrating with

¹ -다aga (-daga) is a Korean grammatical ending that describes something in the midst of happening, as it shifts, pauses, or gives way to something else.

deep reverberation. It's the noise that is the most overwhelming. The sound is domineering, filling the space with a low-pitched grinding that can be felt in the chest.

The chair is an instrument for the clay to manipulate, both through the vibration of sound, and as a physical object through movement. The surface transducers affixed to the underside of the seat play out a two hour loop. They are field recordings of white clay drying, carried out by Lee. While recording the sessions outside, people, creatures, and cars were heard. Their sounds leaked over when listening to the clay dry in an interior setting, though the hum of appliances like a refrigerator were more salient. The fieldwork sessions were recorded with the goal of hearing clay when it experiences the activity of drying—much like its process on view in the gallery space. Through these sessions, Lee reckoned with the inability to isolate a pure sound attributed to clay. The artist was unable to extricate the sound of clay drying from ambient noises. Ultimately, we are witnessing clay in relation to time, its surroundings, and duration of contact. The clay experiences a transformation from wet to dry, embodying ongoing material time as it shrinks, cracks, and fractures into fragments. As the chair continues its movement, the clay becomes displaced as it collides, overlaps, and accumulates, with select plates becoming pulverized from pressure and contact. The process and movement is not entirely linear. The initial movement with the chair creates a trace, but that trace then dries, cracks, and fragments. The material of the clay is changed, subsequently affecting the chair's ongoing movement.

The chair itself simultaneously acts as a functional and sculptural object. The wires power the surface transducers attached to the chair, the speakers responsible for the full-bodied sound causing the chair to move. The vibrations are strong and thunderous. The harsh, abrasive sound occurs irregularly, bringing about a jolt to the gallery space. The acrylic chair is scuffed and scratched, remnants of sound and the action of sanding made visible with the arms cut from the chair, indicating the chair for limited

rest. The shadowy forms of the transducers can be seen through the seat, with the sprawl of wires tucked into the underside of the chair. The wires take on different imagery depending on where you look: veins under translucent skin, fractal branches of rivers or trees, and other organic forms that function as reminders of the natural world, like the frayed copper. Lee's *IN THE COMPANY OF THINGS* traces relationships and dynamics, a continuous transmission between the elements of time, objects, surroundings, and materials. The long wires twist and turn, they may tangle like vines as the chair moves throughout the space. The setting of the gallery is a closed habitat with its walls, speaker, clay, and vinyl sheet.

Clay becomes more active in this form, in that it can move and be heard. Lee's embrace of clay is a shift away from the traditional ceramic treatments of molding, glazing, and firing. The process no longer moves toward a fixed or predetermined endpoint. This development in Lee's practice came about from asking the question, Why fire the clay if interested in the material itself? What kind of questions can be approached through the continuous engagement with clay? It no longer appears necessary to adhere to a rigid process. Lee continues to find clay appealing, especially as they listen more.

This exhibition marks a shift away from thinking about works with clay solely as a ceramic or craft. Lee approaches the installation differently, yearning for an expansion in how we discuss a practice that deviates from how we understand works from the material. *IN THE COMPANY OF THINGS* reads more as a kinetic sculpture, moving within the gallery, with an element of performance through the sound art component. Lee appreciates clay's ability to change and how it holds memory through touch, sediment, and hydration. Usually when viewers engage with ceramics in a gallery space, they limit their engagement approaching it as an artwork, an "end work". Instead, upon encountering *IN THE COMPANY OF THINGS*, Lee recognizes that clay is

affected and in turn affects another and we can be receptive to those conditions of relation. The artist promotes the idea of delayed connection 경청 (kyung-cheong), engaging with what is being heard in tandem to what may be felt or affected by an action. An attentiveness to engage with another, to be affected beyond the immediate. Visitors are welcome to embrace the installation, with no limits on engagement: sit, witness, inspect, listen.

– Rashana Youtzy